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ABSTRACT

Grossmont College, in California, undertook a project to address the issue of institutional and faculty academic vitality and create an environment that encourages faculty to achieve their highest level of professional development. First, symptoms of the loss of faculty vitality were identified as lack of participation in campus affairs, not staying abreast with their disciplines, and severe disenchantment with college teaching. Next, a literature review was conducted to gather data on socioeconomic and psychological factors related to faculty vitality in community colleges. Senior faculty members at the college were then invited to an all-day, off-campus retreat to identify specific policies and practices which had served either as a bridge or barrier to their own professional development. The college president met throughout the 1995-96 academic year with 22 separate campus departments, management, student government, and the Board of Trustee to discuss the bridges and barriers to professional development. Based upon these activities, reports were prepared and distributed to management and faculty detailing specific findings and suggestions to address faculty vitality. The ideas generated from the meetings and reports were incorporated during the following spring term, including projects to bring guest lecturers to campus; to assist tenured female faculty in completing their doctoral dissertations; and to restructure a compulsory, beginning-of-term faculty meeting to include discussion of education-related topics. Contains 28 references. (TGI)

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BRIDGES AND BARRIERS TO FACULTY VITALITY
The Grossmont College Project 1995-1996

A Paper Presented at the
International Conference on Teaching
and Leadership Excellence

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Jack Daniels
Richard Sanchez

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...vitality is the underlying concept that is both the trigger and the goal for renewal status the trigger and goal for renewal efforts. It is an innately desirable concept for academics. A stimulating intellectual environment and the opportunity to be curious and to engage in lifelong learning are what attracts bright, talented people to academe

--Carol Bland & Constance Schmitz

INTRODUCTION: The Problem of Faculty Vitality

Much has been said lately about the "greying" of the professorate. Yet to split an academic "hair," the issue isn't so much the color of faculty coiffures as it is the underlying assumption old folks are no longer productive. While this assertion may be of general interest for all institutions of higher education, it has a particular message for American community colleges. Moreover, as senior faculty---hired as many were during the go-go years of the late 1960s and early 1970s---approach late middle age, a concern emerges with respect to maintaining their job interest, vitality, and productivity. Similarly, there is a parallel worry about vitality because it seems academic burn-out isn't limited solely to instructors with multiple chevrons on their sleeves but afflicts the ranks of younger faculty as well. The Grossmont College Vitality Project (Project) was designed to directly address the loss of faculty vitality in an a conscious effort to combat its deleterious effects.

Despite the affirmation of community colleges as being part of higher education, many of the normal and rejuvenating processes open to university faculty are frequently unavailable for professors in community colleges. As a result, the issue of ***institutional*** vitality is even more critical for community colleges whose state funding often lags behind public state universities thus limiting replacement of senior faculty loss to attrition and retirement. The fiscal inability to replace faculty ushers in a host of complexities which will challenge the very core of community college education. New faculty have long been the source and primary wellspring of ***institutional*** vitality as fresh faces bring with them energy, force, and a spirit of rambunctiousness providing regeneration for academic institutions. It is precisely this dilemma which compelled Grossmont College to embark upon a new and experimental path to faculty vitality; this paper outlines the assumptions, decisions, mistakes and successes experienced by this project.

WHAT IS ACADEMIC VITALITY?

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It is useful to dispense with the problem of defining the word "vitality" as quickly as possible since, as academics, our tendency is to debate the meaning of a terms almost endlessly. The etymology of the word vitality rolls out in Latin as ***vitalis*, "A Quality Pertaining to Life."** While this definition adds little clarification, some help is found by turning to the word "vital" itself: something vital is "essential," absolutely "necessary" for life to be on-going.

Clark and Lewis (1985) devote an entire chapter in *Faculty Vitality and Institutional Productivity* to the meaning of the word "vitality.". They say vitality is a word widely used but often ill defined. To Clark and Lewis, "vitality" refers to those "...essential, yet intangible, positive qualities of individuals and institutions that enable purposeful production" (Clark:3). Schuster (1991) observes vitality defies precise definition because its meaning varies depending upon the context. "Behaviors," he says, "considered indicative of vitality are defined and measured in various ways, depending upon the mission of the institution" (Schuster:44). The implication being what is perhaps productive in a community college might not be considered productive (or vital) in a research university. Maher (1982), too, is sensitive to the nature of contextual relativity averring "The quest for vitality focuses on the capacity of the college to create and sustain the organization strategies that support the continued investment of energy by faculty and staff both in their own career and in the realization of institution's mission" (Maher:3).

The concern at Grossmont College was not to become mired in searching for a precise definition thus in place of a singular definition the Project elected to conceptualize vitality not as a noun but as a verb; vitality is not a person, place, or thing but an activity, a way of behaving. When one is behaving in a certain way one can be said to be behaving vitally. This distinction, of course, begs a further "So what is this way of behaving?" For the purpose of the Project, academic vitality was conceived as: ***the process of making continuous contributions to the institution both in and outside of the classroom while looking forward to Mondays***. Put another way, achieving vitality is ***the creation of an environment encouraging faculty to achieve their highest level of professional development***.

SYMPTOMS OF SAGGING ACADEMIC VITALITY

Indications of the loss of faculty vitality are easy to recognize. Faculty begin to shy away from academic procedures requiring any time outside the classroom. The non-productive faculty member refuses to hang around for department meetings in late afternoon, doesn't want classes on friday, or to participate in ceremonies like commencement. In like fashion, the lack of faculty vitality leads professors to quit reading journals and staying abreast of their disciplines as well as abstaining from professional conference

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attendance or contribution. With respect to teaching, the burned out instructor jettisons requirements for research/term papers along with blue book essay exams replacing them with Scantron. On the whole, unproductive faculty tend to withdraw from campus affairs---unless it affects schedule or salary---avoid committees, accreditation procedures, and other general forms of participation. Perhaps the saddest indicator of vitality loss is when faculty begin to seek other jobs off campus. If this decision was animated by the desire to make more money it might be easier to understand, but often opportunities to enhance one's income exist on campus (e.g. grants, administrative positions, overloads) go begging. It comes as not surprise that the Carnegie Foundation found 41 percent of America's college teachers were less enthusiastic about their work today than when they began their careers, and 46 percent indicated they would consider a nonacademic position if one came along (Boyer, 1987).

Second level symptomology of sagging vitality follows an almost Marxist dictum about alienation. Severe disenchantment with college teaching is recognizable by estrangement from students and colleagues. In this instance, the original excitement and passion of the classroom is replaced with contempt as the burned out teacher uses the classroom as a forum to belittle and vent personal frustrations. In like manner, colleagues come under bilious fire with invective directed toward teachers who still dare to enjoy teaching and have been foolish enough to express this feeling. The classic burned-out instructor, in his most developed state, will find a way to excoriate not only students and colleagues but reserves his greatest venom for the favorite target---the dreaded administrator.

As a college, Grossmont appears to have these situations in proportions no more than or no less than other community colleges. Nonetheless, in the Spring of 1995 a decision was made by a small handful of faculty and administrators to try and rectify this situation. One of the first steps was to review the literature.

KEY THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

Our review of the literature was not meant to be exhaustive. The field of investigation is clearly burgeoning with respect to the general topics of burn-out, academic productivity, and vitality. Despite this growth, however, several thematic constants soon emerge. While many of these studies are geared more towards baccalaureate granting institutions they appear to share two methodological congruities: (1) faculty vitality is designated as the dependent variable and there is a discussion of how to operationalize this quality; and (2) a similar treatment is found examining the independent variables explaining the variance in institutional vitality. In one way or another, studies indicated the traditional factors of salary, lab facilities, or institutional prestige

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played a smaller role than previously believed in setting faculty productivity standards (i.e. Boyer). In general, two broad categories of variables appear to be of interest for community colleges coming under the heading of socio-economic and demographic factors on one hand and psychological factors on the other hand.

Theme 1: Socio-Economic Factors

To say the least, American higher education is in a period of transition. Today, more than 3,400 colleges and universities exist in the United States employing approximately 719,000 faculty members and most of these institutions are caught in a vortex of changing conditions. More women are being hired---approximately 30 percent of all faculty today are women---as well as more ethnic and racial minorities (racial minorities are 10 percent). In 1970, adjunct professors accounted for about 22 percent of community college faculty but today that figure is closer to 36 percent.

The socio-economic and cultural pattern of students has changed as well over the past two decades ushering in new demands. The Big "seven" refers not to a football league but the more common megatrends found in higher education today. Schuster has discussed these elements with respect to American colleges and universities and cannot help but have an effect upon faculty vitality.

1. Deteriorating Fiscal Support

As higher education budgets diminish, colleges have experienced a disproportionate loss of funds for deferred maintenance, laboratories, libraries, student assistance as well as faculty raises, travel, and sabbaticals. As a result, the overall purchasing power of faculty has receded. As Kasper observes (1989), even though sporadic raises in salary have occurred, buying power of college teachers has diminished 10 percent since the peak year of 1972. Monetary is certainly not the "end all" of college teaching but many faculty believe it is some measure of social worth and college teaching is not as publicly appreciated as it once was.

2. Faculty Mobility

By and large the ability of college teachers to have some sense of career mobility has dried up and opportunities to move to another institution are rapidly disappearing. It used to be community college faculty had a chance to move along career lines and to improve their situation by moving to higher paying positions, different locations, or perceived better institutions yet today professorial mobility is for all practical purposes inert.

3. Conflicting Expectations

Community college faculty in particular feel caught are caught in a expectational vortex. Most faculty were socialized in graduate schools with an ethic which placed an emphasis on academic skills and scholarship. Today, however, the public at large, students, college boards, and administration appear are often perceived by faculty to place a greater emphasis on careerism and

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vocational education than on a traditional liberal education in the arts and sciences. Faculty who envision education as an intrinsic activity---with an ennobling power of its own---feel defensive and backed into a corner by those who envision education as a means to an end. Teachers who see their role as the transmission of culture and the preparation of citizens to be members of civil society, believe they are on the outside looking in.

4. Aging of Professorate

Today's college teachers are growing older together and "bunching up" at the more senior levels. In 1987, the United States Department of Education estimated close to 70 percent of all college teachers will be "tenured in." In 1977, for example, the ratio of senior professors to junior professors was 1.22 to 1, while in 1987 it dropped to 0.7 to 1. The relaxation of mandatory retirement ceilings in 1984 has led Eble and McKeachie (1985) to estimate by the turn of the century the modal age of tenured faculty will be between 56 and 65. This forecast further underscores the necessity of focussing upon faculty vitality programs for an increasingly senior faculty ratio.

5. Shifting Values on Campus

All kinds of conditions contribute to a shift in core values in American higher education. Men and women with fresh doctorates from large research oriented campuses are not are finding jobs in similar universities and are accepting jobs in smaller, liberal arts colleges and community colleges oriented towards teaching. This trend introduces yet another tension for faculty by reshuffling demands for merit pay, promotion, and excellence. Of course, the attendant phenomena of multi-culturalism and political correctness ushers in their own set of demands for change in academic core values.

6. Compressed Career Ladders

Another pressure introduced has been the disappearance of a career ladder in community colleges. It soon becomes clear to the rank and file faculty member little chance exists to move to another college. Net disincentives in pay cuts, lack of job opportunities, interruption of retirement plans all serve to limit faculty mobility. Some faculty appear accepting of these limitations (those usually with prior secondary experience) while others are disenchanted by the presence of this state of affairs. Schuster found in most community colleges academic rank is non-existent and promotion or salary comes as a function of seniority. Under such conditions little incentive is introduced for productivity and the perception of merit pay is anathema. As Schuster points out, for those faculty who do produce above and beyond the classroom, "...the absence of any normal career ladder can have a dampening effect on motivation." (1991:10)

7. Faculty Morale

As a result of changes in institutional conditions on American colleges, faculty morale has suffered. In 1984, the National Institute of Education

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surveyed 5000 college teachers and found 38 percent of the respondents indicated a desire to leave college teaching within the next 5 years and 40 percent were less enthusiastic about their work than when they began (*Study Group on Conditions of Excellence*). As a result, the interviewees contended faculty "...morale is worse in their department than five years ago." Lack of respect, the perceived inability to participate in shared governance, and pressure to attach higher education to the job market all serve to discourage today's college teachers.

Theme 2: Psychological Factors of Developmentalism, Atmosphere, and Will

Research on college productivity has identified three perceptual areas likely to affect academic vitality. The first of these is the lack of institutional sensitivity to the fact college teaching is a ***career*** and faculty have different needs at different stages of their lives and professional development. Second, the very ***collegiate atmosphere*** of an institution can directly affect how faculty view themselves, their work, and others around them. Lastly, while much is understood about the correlates of faculty withdrawal few institutions possess the ***will*** or conscious determination to correct it.

1. Community College Teaching as a Career

Roger Baldwin (1985) and others have pointed to the need to recognize the developmental nature of faculty careers. To overlook this aspect of college teaching is perilous. This is particularly true of community colleges where often teaching is conceived of as a continuous activity without evolution. The normal "stages" of college teaching are: (1) career entry; (2) early career; (3) mid-career; and (4) later career and Baldwin contends it is essential to recognize these steps in a formal manner.

Each career level presents distinctive challenges and community college professors are no different than other professionals in business, government service, or military. Institutions of higher education tend to overlook the evolutionary nature of academic life thus failing to acknowledge the developmental nature of careers. The result is the application of the same modes of evaluation and expectations for all irrespective of age or years of service. In the American community college system a faculty member is classified as an instructor in the future one's academic persona will still be defined by the same terms as when he or she began 25 years ago. This lack of sensitivity to an individual's need to evolve and grow suggests yet another psychological cause of diminishing vitality. To say the least, performing the exact same job for a lifetime can be mind numbing in any career but for a trained academic it can have profound emotional consequences.

2. Maintaining a Collegiate Atmosphere

The linkage between an academic atmosphere and productivity has been recognized since the 5th century B.C. in ancient Athens. Both Plato, founder of

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the Academy, and Aristotle, creator of the Lyceum, understood the relationship between faculty vitality on one hand and the surroundings in which teaching and thinking occurred on the other hand. Surely no one would dispute that teaching load, assistance, salary, better equipment, and new facilities are major components of creating an institutional excellence. Nonetheless, it is equally important to understand symbolic elements of collegiate life. An established intellectual environment creates a setting within which collegiality grows: without collegiate atmosphere academic vitality is lessened. "Increasingly," notes Boyer, "faculty burnout is being talked about in higher education. The undergraduate college, which depends so much on vitality in the classroom, must be served by faculty members who can be renewed throughout their careers....We strongly recommend that every college commit itself to the professional growth of all faculty and provide them with opportunities to stay intellectually alive." (1987, 44).

3. Lack of Conscious Will

As Schuster, Clark and others argue, a great deal is known about the independent variables which affect vitality. Perhaps the key variable, however, is whether or not we possess the strength of conviction to consciously do something about it. The disparity between what is understood about faculty burn out and what is actively done to face it has not gone unnoticed. The Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education recently reported "Much is known about the conditions under which ...growth can be maximized...but our colleges, community colleges, and universities rarely seek and apply this knowledge in shaping their educational policies and practices" (emphasis added; 1984:141). Students of the subject of academic vitality contend answers are available to address the issue of faculty disenchantment but question if leadership is up to the task of connecting theory with practice. When Schuster posed the question does "...sufficient will and commitment exist to develop comprehensive developmental programs?" he answered more often than not "no" (1991:1).

In earlier times, it seems the general feeling of college leaders about academic vitality was simply it would tend to take care of itself. As early as 1810 there is some limited evidence of institutional responses to bolster faculty vitality in the form of sabbaticals, leaves of absence, reduced teaching loads, and release time. Prior to 1970, little investigation focussed upon the topic of faculty productivity and practically no one examined which institutional responses could be adopted to enhance teaching, research, scholarship, and faculty contributions. This lacunae in the research has been filled in over the past two decades particularly by the efforts of George Baker and John Roueche. Baker and Roueche (1982, 1985) have taken the high ground to assert a definite relationship exists between excellence and leadership and a strong, coherent, and

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effective leadership with the "will" to move can create a culture for excellence.

THE GROSSMONT VITALITY PROJECT: Goals, History, Methods, Results

The idea of the faculty vitality Project rests upon the assumption that improvement in academic vitality requires leaders who must consciously, knowingly, and deliberately make things happen. Armed with this conviction, Brown and Sanchez began to shape a strategy in the Spring of 1995 to address the issue at Grossmont College. Given the age of its faculty, close to half of the college's instructional faculty would become eligible to retire in the next few years. Noting this aging of faculty it was decided to tap the resource of senior faculty in an off-campus venue and seek their perspective. In March of 1995, invitations went out to faculty whose tenure exceeded two decades at Grossmont College. The meeting centered upon faculty vitality and was held in the board room of a nearby corporation lasting all day. Coordinated by a faculty member (Brown) and observed by top management (Sanchez, Daniels) faculty were asked to identify specific policies, practices, and institutions which had served either as a ***BRIDGE*** or a ***BARRIER*** to their own professional development over the past two decades. As one could imagine, the meeting and topic was viewed with elements of both hesitation and curiosity by senior faculty who attended. The group worked to identify and prioritize both bridges and barriers and then turned to suggesting answers. The impact of this all day, off campus retreat, was profound for all participants, yet many who attended remained apprehensive since they knew without follow-up it was a worthless exercise. The president promised to follow-through by offering to work on the ideas and give a public response at the all faculty meeting in five months time. In an effort to sustain the momentum, the college's president declared faculty vitality to be one of his goals for the coming 1995-96 academic year and committed both fiscal and personnel resources to the project. In similar fashion, Dr. Brown was given reassigned time to coordinate the Project and it began in earnest in August of 1995.

Methods

Located at the core of Grossmont College's Vitality Project is the desire to connect pedagogical theory with practice along three different but related dimensions. The Project rests upon the fundamental assumption that a healthy, vital, active and participatory faculty is a functional prerequisite of excellence for an educational institution. Furthermore, the physical, moral, and intellectual well-being of faculty is a double-edged sword, stimulating to students on one hand and to faculty themselves on the other hand. As a strategic point of departure, the fall term of 1995 was designated as a period of information gathering and dispersal. Moreover, it was felt the findings of review of the scholarly literature on faculty vitality could serve as a basis for a discussion of the bridges and barriers to professional development.

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In the Fall of 1995, the Project was formally initiated by President Sanchez during the traditional all-faculty meeting the week prior to instruction. Over subsequent months, Brown met with twenty-two separate departments on campus as well as management, student government, and the Board of Trustees. Each meeting began with an explanation of the Project and its purpose as well as a recap the findings from the research literature. Thus as a methodological technique, each presentation started by emphasizing the known psychological conditions for enhancing vitality: (1) there must be a conscious effort to connect theory with practice; (2) faculty vitality is enhanced to the extent there is an established collegiate atmosphere; and (3) it is necessary to be sensitive to the trichotomous nature of faculty careers acknowledging the different needs of entry faculty, mid-career, and senior faculty. Each meeting would conclude by calling upon faculty to identify bridges and barriers which had served to either help or deter them from attaining their highest personal level of professional achievement.

Results

Several general observations should be clarified at the onset. First, there is a potential for backfire on a project such as this and that potential is linked to the institutional commitment to follow through and connect findings with change. Nothing could be worse than to embark upon this journey, isolate problems, and then fail to act. A second observation circles around disentangling expected petty complaints found generally in any work place from the larger problems of an institutional nature. As one could guess, faculty pinpointed barriers over bridges by a large margin, but it is necessary to be prepared to focus upon the campus-wide suggestions compared to narrow, self-serving recommendations. Lastly, one should be prepared to hear recurrent themes over and over again. It is important, however, when repetition occurs, to listen intently and cheerfully to these statements even though they have been heard previously. There are two compelling reasons for such magnanimity: (1) no small part the project is simply the listening itself, the extension of the idea that leaders are concerned with what faculty have to say; and (2) within the repetition lies the evidence validating the ultimate recommendations of the project itself.

Based upon the meetings which took place in the previous semester, an enumeration of the perceived bridges and barriers to faculty vitality---along with 20 specific suggestions---was incorporated into a report and delivered to management in January of 1996. The president of the college, in turn, wrote ***Grossmont College Faculty Vitality: A Report to the Faculty*** distributed to all faculty detailing the findings and his responses. Thus the Spring term became the first instance of trying to incorporate the new ideas. The scope of this paper disallows a lengthy discussion of the innovative changes made in Spring of

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1996. Suggestions ranged over a vast field from bringing in distinguished lecturers to helping tenure track women faculty complete their doctoral dissertations. One example, however, might help. At the beginning of every semester the college has always had an all compulsory faculty meeting dominated by administrators and non-academic subjects. In response to faculty pleas to alter this format, the president reduced administrative time to less than ten minutes and in his place a panel of four prominent local higher education attorneys was put on. The topic was "Law and the Classroom" and each lawyer took a specific area to address (the topics were solicited from all faculty weeks earlier) and discussed legislative and case law implications. Topics included liabilities with respect to grading, confidentiality, cheating, harassment, violence and litigation. The response was overwhelmingly positive and for the first time the primary complaint was the all faculty meeting was too short. A broadbrush treatment of these elements can be found in ***APPENDIX II***.

By way of exit, some mention should be made of measuring the success of this effort. Estimating the utility of the such a project is difficult for two reasons. First, the very nature of the subject matter does not lend itself easily to quantification and data are hard to acquire. From a qualitative perspective, however, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Second, the temporal aspect of this program suggests it is a long-term, programmatic effort thus immediate aspects should not be expected right away. These caveats aside, let us point out but one example of what we believe to be "success."

Generally, commencement ceremonies at Grossmont College have been routine matters attended by the same faculty regulars. Commencement exercises in June of 1996, however, were targeted by the Project and two powerful speakers were invited (Vice-president Al Gore and State Senator Lucy Killea). In addition, the faculty "robing" was shifted to the campus Art Gallery along with live music and after the conclusion of the commencement ceremony faculty were invited to wear their gowns to nearby home serving appetizers and liquid refreshments. The number of faculty who attended commencement grew 90 percent from the past decade's average. A similar measure of success was an increase in the number of applications for academic rank promotion. Of course, the hardest result to quantify---yet the most satisfying---were the personal notes, phone calls, and appreciative comments by faculty.

SUMMARY

It is an assumed truism that excellence in community college education is to a large extent a function of the vibrancy, creativity, and productivity of its faculty. Surely, the overall institutional health of a community college depends upon many factors yet none is more crucial than a faculty supported by an environment encouraging them to seek excellence and achieve their highest level

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of professional accomplishment. A corollary assumption contends that a robust and active faculty is infectious and can penetrate the spirit of administration, students, staff, and trustees. What is simultaneously paradoxical, however, is the discrepancy between what is known about faculty vitality and what is acted upon. Despite a burgeoning literature identifying the key factors explaining the variance in faculty vitality, it seems few campuses take ***conscious*** steps to rectify the situation. Creating and sustaining an institutional milieu capable of nurturing faculty vitality simply does not happen by itself but requires vigor, foresight, and will. The academic community at Grossmont College is presently engaged in a deliberate exercise to make it a better place to work.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Grossmont College is located on the eastern edge of the San Diego metroplex in El Cajon, California. Founded in 1960, the college today has approximately 16,000 students and 200 fulltime faculty. The 135 acre campus overlooks Fletcher Hills and is nestled in a suburban neighborhood at the base of Cowles Mountain. While being a full service California community college offering a variety of programs, degrees, and training, emphasis has traditionally been on transfer and general education curriculum. Richard Sanchez received his B.S. from Northern Arizona University; an M.Ed. from California Polytechnic Institute (Pomona); and the Ed.D. from Western Michigan University and became president of Grossmont College in 1990. Jack E. Daniels, III earned the B.A. from Huntington College and the Ph.D. from Wright Institute Graduate School of Psychology before becoming Vice-President, Academic Affairs at Grossmont College in 1995. Lee Brown joined the faculty of the Department of Political Science in 1969 after attending San Diego State University (A.B. and M.A.) and the University of Texas at Austin (Ph.D.); he retired in June of 1996. Further inquiries can be made by calling (619) 465-1700 or by writing to 8800 Grossmont College Drive, El Cajon, CA 92020.

APPENDIX 2: Bridges and Barriers

During the 1995-96 academic year the Grossmont College Faculty Vitality Project sought input from faculty on identifying those policies, practices, and institutions which had served to thwart their achievement of their highest level of academic excellence. The identification of the major bridges and barriers to

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faculty vitality at the Grosssmont campus as well as specific suggestions/responses are discussed in two documents. Contact the Dr. Richard Sanchez (see Appendix 1) and request:

Preliminary Report - Vitality Project by A. Lee Brown (January 16, 1996)

Grossmont College Faculty Vitality: A Report to the Faculty by Richard M. Sanchez (May 1996).